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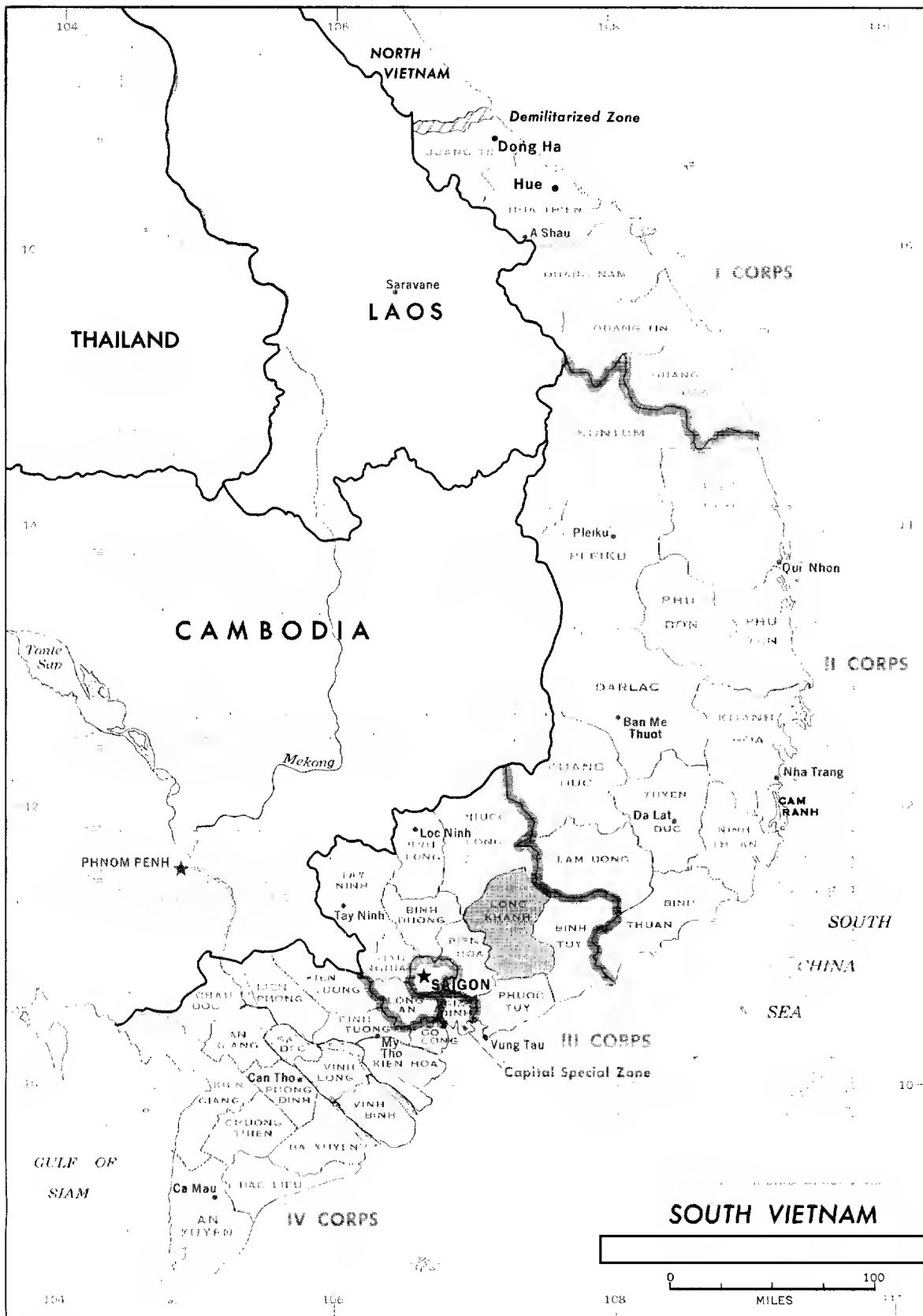
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[Vietnam: The Communists conducted mortar and rocket attacks across the country this weekend, and sharp fighting is under way in provinces near Saigon.

Saigon was hit by four rockets on 15 March, the day following a similar token shelling of Hue. Neither attack caused much damage.

Communist forces appear to be making extensive use of the Demilitarized Zone as activity picks up in that area. On Saturday, some 15 rockets were launched against allied targets south of the DMZ, apparently from enemy positions in the southern part of the zone. Just south of the zone on 16 March, the Communists launched ground attacks that inflicted heavy casualties on an allied platoon.

Elsewhere in I Corps, a Communist mortar and sapper attack near Dong Ha left 21 civilian and military dead.

Most special forces camps in the highlands were hit by mortar fire, and there were many small actions along the coast of II Corps. A similar round of mortar attacks occurred in the delta provinces of IV Corps, but produced few casualties and little damage.

Sharp ground fighting that began east of Saigon on Friday continued throughout the weekend and spread to other III Corps provinces around the capital. The enemy still has not committed the bulk of his strength in this area, however. East of Saigon, major elements of the Communist 5th Division and the 95th and 33rd regiments now are located in southern Long Khanh Province. Some of these units went into action late on 16 March; first reports indicate that several villages and hamlets in Long Khanh have come under strong Communist ground attacks.]

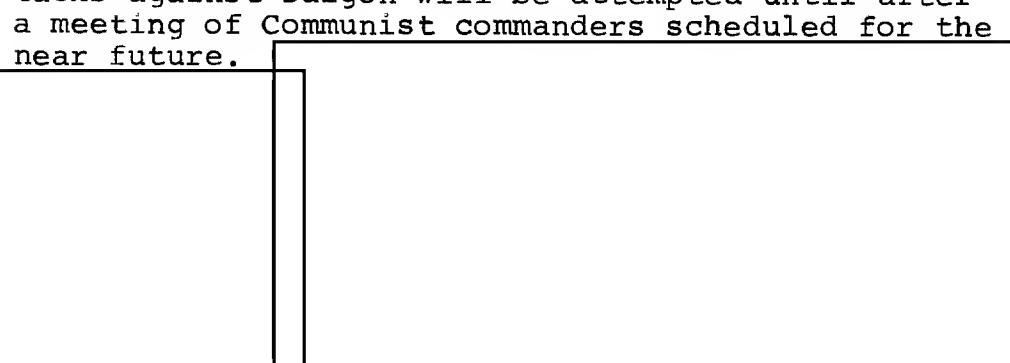
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[redacted] no ground attacks against Saigon will be attempted until after a meeting of Communist commanders scheduled for the near future.

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USSR - Communist China: Neither Moscow nor Peking appears ready to back down on the issue of the disputed island in the Ussuri River.

The Soviet note protesting the encounters on 14 and 15 March stated that Chinese and Soviet border troop representatives met on 12 March, but apparently nothing was resolved and further incidents may take place.

The clashes over the weekend probably stemmed from a Chinese effort to counter Soviet patrols which Peking had officially protested on 13 March.

Soviet and Chinese versions naturally differ, but both suggest that the clash on 15 March may have been larger than the one on 2 March and that artillery was used by both sides. Nevertheless, the fighting has not spread to other areas, a sign that neither side desires a general encounter. The top Soviet leadership except for Defense Minister Grechko arrived in Budapest for the Warsaw Pact meeting yesterday, suggesting that the Russians believe the situation is still under control. Grechko has just returned to Moscow from a visit to Pakistan and will presumably join the delegation shortly. [redacted]

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Czechoslovakia: Private interest groups are taking advantage of the country's new federal system of government to institutionalize the political voice they gained last year.

They are re-forming under federal charters, and each espouses a political platform tending to extend the liberal-moderate-conservative split in the Communist Party to the population at large. Legally, they have the party's blessing, but the leadership clearly did not envision the complicated situation that prevails today.

Last week the trade unions formed a federal organization, which is a strong supporter of democratic reforms. Semi-independent youth groups formed a similarly oriented national body on 11-12 March. Conservatives, however, are trying to create a rival youth organization, which can be expected to support their views.

Politics prevented Czech and Slovak theater artists from setting up a federal body because the Slovaks--perhaps under the influence of their more conservative party leaders--would not agree to dedicate the organization to fighting for freedom of expression. In another recent case, militant liberal students from Prague failed to convince students from other areas to join in a nationwide coalition of political activists. Students from outside Prague apparently felt the capital's students were too radical. On the other hand, the Czech Intellectuals Association on 13 March offered to join with the trade unions in an effort to preserve the liberal gains made in 1968.

As such differing groups proliferate, the party's chances of keeping them under control will be made more difficult, and such groups could develop on the national scene as political forces in their own right.

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Hungary: The party secretariat, in a three-day conference with party, mass media, and government officials, is probably furnishing detailed instructions on how to implement the new political reforms announced last week.

In a related move, party secretary Biszku told the political academy on 13 March that, under the reforms, lower party organizations should have a more independent, streamlined role. He recommended that the party place more emphasis on ideological work and assume more of a guidance role, concentrating less on detailed administrative work that properly is the responsibility of state and economic organizations.

The party hopes such changes will encourage local initiative without significantly decreasing party control. [redacted]

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Western Europe: British, Dutch, and West German officials are increasingly confident that a draft agreement on their gas centrifuge project for producing enriched uranium will be ready for signature by mid-summer.

At a meeting in London last week, ministers of the three countries decided to begin simultaneous construction of centrifuges in Britain and The Netherlands. These are to come into production in the early 1970s. Although there are no plans to build a similar plant in Germany, the administrative headquarters for the project will be located there, and costs of the program will be split roughly three ways.

The Dutch and Germans will sign an agreement limiting their uses of plants and materials to peaceful purposes. Safeguards will be handled initially under the UK-EURATOM agreement. No decisions will be made regarding the exchange of technical data until a tripartite agreement on the protection of data, expected around mid-April, is signed.

The ministers set up a working committee to study proposals for the participation of other countries in this cheaper enrichment process. They foresee eventual association with other countries, but they expect to keep the manufacture of critical equipment among the three partners. Up to now, the participants have invited no fourth country to join, although Italy is said to have been "on the doorstep," and France is concerned over being left out.

A British minister has concluded that one of the greatest achievements of the recent meeting was the high degree of agreement at the political level, making the way easier for future scientific and technical cooperation.

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Dominican Republic: Continued student unrest exacerbates the political problems facing the Balaguer government.

The administration's refusal to raise the budget of the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo has led to five weeks of demonstrations; one student has been killed. Tear gas and police blockades prevented the disturbances last week from spilling into the capital's downtown area, but agitation is continuing both at the university and in secondary schools throughout the country.

The disparate elements of Balaguer's opposition have begun efforts to form some sort of front against him since he has hinted that he may run again in 1970. Continuing and increasingly violent demonstrations raise the possibility that security forces will act with less restraint in the future and present the opposition with another rallying point. Moreover, the government's "temporary" suspension of the major opposition's radio program, apparently because of thinly veiled calls for disorder, will raise new problems. [redacted]

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India: Discontent among the Congress Party high command has been highlighted by a split between the two top party leaders in Kashmir.

Stability of the unpopular Congress government in Kashmir is threatened by a growing rift in Congress ranks. Mir Qasim's recent resignation as both the state's party president and a member of the state legislature brings to a head the long-simmering conflict between Qasim and Chief Minister G. M. Sadiq. Most recently, the two have differed over the choice for a vacant cabinet post and Sadiq's conciliatory policy toward popular opposition leader Sheikh Abdullah.

Press reports indicate Qasim is supported by a majority of the party's state legislators, who also have become increasingly alienated by Sadiq's propensity to act without their counsel. The weak Sadiq government, since coming into power in 1964, has been heavily dependent on the central government, and the reported dispatch of Home Minister Chavan to Kashmir indicates that New Delhi will play a major role in resolving the present situation.

Party friction in Kashmir comes at a particularly inopportune time for New Delhi. Senior Congress leaders there have just narrowly averted a showdown over party discipline arising from personal attacks in parliament against Deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai. Party dissension was also evident in the recent resignation of former food minister C. Subramanian from the Congress Working Committee--the party's major decision-making organ. Subramanian quit in protest when the party aligned itself with a disreputable splinter group to establish a Congress-led coalition government in Bihar State.

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Squabbling in Congress ranks is likely to continue in the aftermath of the poor mid-term election showing, but neither the party's hold on the central government nor Prime Minister Gandhi's position appear to be in jeopardy at this time.

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